

I like to think that  
my paintings aren't  
complete until  
someone else  
looks at them.

I don't see it as a  
mission—but when  
it happens, I really  
do cherish it.

- Ana Cardoso



*Untitled, 2025*  
*Acrylic on wood panel, 90 x 75 cm*

Shaping New  
Memories  
Through  
Painting

with

# Ana Cardoso



*Portuguese artist Ana Cardoso in her studio in Leça da Palmeira, Porto, 2025*

**Hello Ana, thank you for doing this interview with us. We like to start our conversations with a look into the past. What were your beginnings in the arts?**

I can't pinpoint a specific moment, however, I remember enjoying drawing and experimenting like most children. I also remember saving up the money I had gotten for my birthday and Christmas when I was 8 or 9 and buying wax crayons at the nearest supermarket with it. Then, around the age of 10 or 11, I first came into contact with oil painting and absolutely loved it! So much that I asked my parents for a small oil paint set the following Christmas.

I also developed an early connection to drawing thanks to my maternal grandfather, who was a very skilled draftsman and used to correct my drawings on Sunday afternoons during family gatherings. So, I'd say that my interest in art was something that grew and evolved naturally over time, without a specific starting or turning point I could name.

**Later on, you studied Fine Art at the University of Porto, from where you hold a Master's degree in Drawing. What was your path towards pursuing art professionally? And was it always clear to you that you wanted to "become" an artist?**

I knew early on that what fulfilled me the most were things connected to the arts—mainly painting and drawing, but also music and literature, though those paths didn't open up for me in the same way. But realising you love something is very different from thinking you can make a life out of it. And honestly, I don't quite understand what it is to become an artist. When you decide to study painting, there's a kind of beautiful madness involved. No one enters art school thinking, I'm going to be an artist. That's not the point. What drives you is the need to create. In my case, I genuinely can't imagine doing anything else. I've had to do other things at times, sure—but I always come back to painting. It's the only thing that makes sense to me. Oddly enough, I think it's dangerous to believe you've

already become an artist—it ties your identity too much to the idea of “profession.” And that, in turn, can stifle your creative freedom. A certain amount of naivety is vital to making art.

**Let’s speak about your paintings now, which you describe as a “dialogue between the detailed figurative and formal simplification.” I also read that leaving the interpretation of your pieces to the viewer is an important part of your work. Could you please comment on both statements and tell us more about your work?**

Everything is a dialogue. From what happens within our bodies to what is foreign to them, we are—among many other things that go beyond my understanding—a bundle of physical actions and reactions, situations, and emotion. There isn’t always a clear boundary between what is mine and what belongs to the other.

I try to create space so that what comes from my innermost self can be received as a memory by someone else — and that only happens if the other, the viewer, plays an active role in shaping that new memory, without letting my own self take over entirely. I try to outline a path, to guide the painting in a certain direction, but at the same time I avoid defining its final destination too precisely. I want the viewer’s gaze to complete the meaning of the painting.

What you want to say is important — but just as important as knowing how to say it. And for that, formal choices must be made: colour, composition, size, support, medium. The balance between what appears as detailed figurative and formal simplification is one of the strategies I use to make that happen. I like to think that my paintings aren’t complete until someone else looks at them. I don’t see it as a mission—but when it happens, I really do cherish it.

**Is there any painting you’d like to speak about more in detail?**

That’s a tricky one. Once a painting is finished, I feel like I have to step away from it. Speaking about it almost feels like interrupting its life—as though I’m trespassing.

**You mentioned before that you always return to painting, that it’s the only thing that makes sense to you. What is it that fascinates you about painting, why is it your favourite medium to work with?**

The medium is just a means to an end. Like language. I wouldn’t speak Portuguese to someone who doesn’t understand it—if I want to communicate something, I must choose the right tool to make that happen. Painting has, recently, been the medium that best supports the kind of work I’ve been doing. But about ten years ago, I did an exhibition with no paintings at all. It was made up of 17 drawings, each paired with a short text or poem I had written, plus an installation. That show needed drawing—not painting. So while painting is definitely the language I’m most fluent in, I won’t rule out other media if they’re what a project requires. Still... I hope I don’t need to use them too often. Because I really do love painting.

**And have you been drawn to figurative painting from the very start?**

Yes, like most people, I started with what is most immediate — the figure. Even though I appreciate some ab-



*Untitled, 2023*  
*Acrylic on wood panel, 136 x 129 cm*

stract paintings, abstraction has never appealed to me as a personal form of expression. At university, I developed a fondness for words, to the point that I created academic projects in which I eliminated figuration and used only text. Although words and images have very hybrid variables, words have the unique ability to create what we call a mental image. The word/image dichotomy is something that has never left me. For about ten years now, I haven't used words visually in my work, but they're always there, backstage, and I believe it's only a matter of time before they return to the stage. It's a constant struggle I face in the studio: I want to bring them back, but I haven't yet found a way to do so without losing the openness to interpretation that I seek.

**My next question is about the creative process, the actual work that happens in the studio. What does yours look like? How do you get started, for example, and what are some of the other stages of your process?**

There are many inputs when I begin a painting. Music, for instance, always plays a very important role in the process. The first thing I do in the morning, when I walk into the studio, is to think about the first song I feel like listening to — almost as if that choice will set the tone for my day. Usually, it's Portuguese music, because the meaning of the words plays such a powerful role in my creative process. I'm also an avid consumer of images. I can spend hours searching for the image that convinces me to be the right starting point for the narrative I want to build. This happens in the studio, but also very often while I travel — both inside and outside of museums. Travelling is not just something I enjoy; whenever possible, I try to fit in a trip between more demanding and time-consuming projects. A kind of warrior's rest between battles, as if I were cleaning my weapons. Short breaks in daily life also work as a kind of journey.

***“Observing, listening instead of producing — those are moments that are very important and necessary to my process.”***

In the end, I think it all comes together. It's like tuning different “instruments” that will set off the painting. Once that's in place, the rest — the act of painting itself — begins to unfold. This doesn't mean that the painting has a life of its own or that it's inevitable.

***“But for me, it's essential to “listen” to what the painting is asking for or demanding.”***

**And could you point to any of the parts you just spoke about and say which one is the most enjoyable to you?**

All of these parts of the process are precious and important to me. One cannot exist without the others, so I can't really say which one is the most meaningful or enjoyable. Maybe I could tell you which is the least — and that would be the purely technical part that comes right at the end of my task, just before the painting reaches the viewer: applying the varnish.

**And as we're approaching the end of this interview, I have five last questions for you. First, could you put into words how painting makes you feel?**

I'm not quite sure how to answer that. Painting, like many other forms of art, is a part of me — and more than that, it's what shapes and builds me, to a large extent. There's no way to separate one from the other.

**Next, when you are the viewer and not the author of an artwork, what is it that you're looking for in a piece of art?**

Unfortunately, most of the time, what shapes the way I look at things is the particular stage of the studio process I'm in. I'm constantly searching in others for technical solutions to apply to my own painting. More and more, I try to break away from that — to look with a completely unintentional, detached gaze. Because there's nothing more astonishing than when we feel that “wow” and we

weren't even looking for anything. I like art that doesn't need to be explained.

**What have you been interested in or inspired by lately?**

In general, I tend to be drawn to and inspired by areas of the arts that I don't actually practise myself — perhaps because I'm not able to dissect them, which allows me to have that detached kind of gaze. Once again, literature and music come to mind. The classics I keep returning to, but also Saramago, Clarice Lispector, or Elis Regina. And then those who are my contemporaries, like Afonso Cruz, Sérgio Godinho, Caetano Veloso or Chico Buarque — artists who hold an endless supply of ideas and phrases that could easily serve as the title or the starting point for an entire exhibition.

**Any advice you'd like to share with fellow emerging artists?**

I don't believe there's such a thing as a valid piece of advice — nor do I think there's any real need for one.

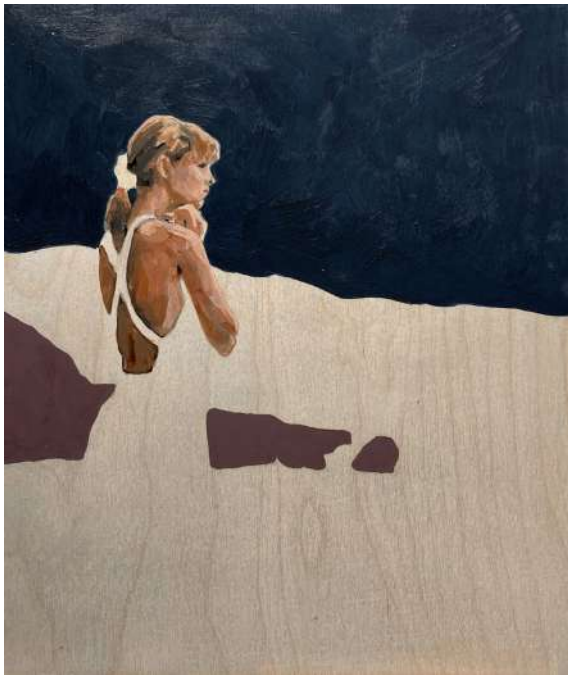
***“To me, the beauty lies in the uncertainty, in the steps forward and the steps back along the path we carve out.”***

I truly believe that Art often lives in those pauses. What I can say with absolute certainty, though, is that it's important to look. To experiment. To look and experiment again. And to keep doing it, over and over. I'd even go as far as to say it's important to be aware of the fact that along the way, a good deal of stubbornness and a touch of boldness might be necessary too.

**And last one, if there was only one thing that people could take away from your work, what would you want that to be?**

Whatever it is they're missing.

*Get in touch with Ana on Instagram: @ana\_cardoso\_atelier*



*Untitled, 2023  
Acrylic on wood panel, 35 x 30 cm*



*Untitled, 2025  
Acrylic on wood panel, 150 x 130 cm*



Up: *Untitled*, 2023, acrylic on wood panel, 130 x 127 cm  
Down: *Untitled*, 2024, acrylic on wood panel, 106 x 135 cm (left) / *Untitled*, 2024, acrylic on wood panel, 140 x 170 cm



*Untitled, 2024*  
*Oil on wood panel, 90 x 75 cm*